

Glass Cage: Menagerie

by Timesprite

Category: X-Men

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-16 09:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-16 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:00:27

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,788

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: First in a rather gothic, moody series, told in first person naration by Domino. A simple early morning run goes awry.

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Special thanks go out to Threnody, who generally kicked my arse and told be that yes, I could do a decent job writing Domino. Thanks also go out to all those who read Gothic Delusions, wrote me, and demanded more. I couldn't have done this with out all or you! Oh, and apologies to the crew in #Subcafe who listened to me whine about this.

Disclaimer: I don't claim any ownership of Domino or Cable. They belong to Marvel (unfortunately...) The other characters in the story are mine. Borrow with permission

Glass Cage: Menagerie

The sun is just peeking over the horizon when I wake up. The bedside clock is reading five am. Five am is not a sight I like to see. Then again, I'm hardly a stranger to sleeplessness Nate is still sound asleep as I untangle myself from the sheets. I briefly contemplate waking him, but there's a certain peacefulness about him now that's hard to find when he's awake. A beautiful day is dawning over San Francisco. Almost makes it worth being awake. I might as well take advantage of the nice weather . I change into workout clothes and pull on a pair of running shoes. I tie my hair back (it's grown out nicely in the two years since that bitch Gryaznova shaved it off) and on my way out the door I leave a note for Nathan telling him to meet me at ten thirty for breakfast. I stick the Post-It Note the one place I'm sure he'll see it- dead center on the coffee maker.

And then I set out.

Running is a nice normal activity in this unarguably abnormal life. I'm out here with house wives and businessmen alike, a part of the world instead of apart from it. There's nothing inherently dangerous

in a morning run, except, perhaps, the garbage trucks. I like that. The bay is still cloaked in fog as it comes into view, the Golden Gate Bridge looking like some sort of monstrous sea creature in it's half shrouded state. As the morning wears on, more people emerge to take advantage of the nice weather.

The minute I see the guy, a warning bell goes off in the back of my head. He's making a fast jog towards me, but he looks uncomfortable, as if he's not used to the exercise. He doesn't look like a runner at all. I keep an eye on him, weary of the odd, nervous look on his face. As we pass each other, he slams into my left shoulder with enough force to almost knock me off my feet. "What the hell?" I stop and spin around in time to see him sprinting away at top speed. "Jerk," I mutter and rub at my shoulder. It's a moment before I notice the odd tingling sensation and glance over at my arm to see the tiny red pinprick against my white skin. "Shit." The world lurches and spins and I catch myself against a light pole, my knees give out and I'm falling into darkness.

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I hate being kidnapped. \*Really\* hate it. Number one way to piss me off. And it happens far too often, it seems. I sigh and lean back against the wall of the dark cell, trying to get comfortable (or as comfortable as I can possibly get shackled as I am) and my mind drifts back to other kidnappings. What's it going to be this time? Old enemies? Old employers? Someone trying to get at Nathan? I think I got really sick of this pattern the last time I was held hostage. That was that wacko Halloween Jack. And before that, Gryaznova. And before that, Tol- No. I am most definitely \*not\* going to go there. That is precisely the last thing I need to think about sitting here in the dark. So much like when- I frown. Well, there's not much to do now but wait for my captor to put in a timely appearance. The faster they show up, the faster I can get out of here- wherever this is. I really hate being kidnapped.

Turns out I don't have to wait that long after all, which is good, because I'm already getting really pissed off.

"Well now, there's my little prize."

This is sick. Just twisted. He's a kid!- Sam's age, if that. He could win Young Republican of the Year, easy. I'm on my feet before he realizes it, almost nose to nose.

He grins. "There's my tiger. Glad to see they didn't...damage you. I hate broken merchandise."

Condescending bastard! I twist my right wrist experimentally and the shackle pops open. A grin flashes across my face a split second before I clock him.

He doesn't stagger backwards. Doesn't flinch. He doesn't even blink, and my hand feels like I've slammed it into a titanium wall. I swing the other arm around to try and hit him with the right shackle swinging free on the chain but he catches it and yanks my arm painfully upward.

"Ophelia?"

I hadn't noticed the girl until now, standing quietly in the doorway. She steps up dutifully, her long brown hair hanging limply around her face. She looks like a beaten dog. He holds out his free hand and she obediently hands him something that looks like a modified inhibitor collar. I lash out at him again, but his grip on the chain is firm and my blows do nothing. He jerks me upward so that my toes are barely on the concrete and my shoulder is screaming in protest.

The collar goes on.

He lets me back onto my feet and re-locks the shackle. I realize I'm not going to be home in time for dinner. This isn't open and shut. This guy knows what he's doing and he has me at a disadvantage. Shit. I hate feeling helpless. Almost as much as I hate being kidnapped.

"There. No need for such a fuss, was there?" He asks. A swift kick in the gut is his reply. Unsurprisingly, he's unaffected and I find myself back handed into the wall, vision swimming and blood trickling from the corner of my mouth. The right side of my face has gone numb.

"Such spirit! This is going to be delightful. She'll make a lovely addition to my menagerie, don't you think?"

The girl- Ophelia- nods silently. Mr. Nigh Invulnerable laughs and leads the docile thing out of the room, locking the thick steel door behind him.

Time to take stock of the situation. It's obvious that escape is not going to be easy, if possible at all. Still, it's only a matter of time before Nathan shows up, guns blazing to bail my butt out. If anything, he'll be angry for having to come after me. I can almost see the annoyed look on his face... That's the first time I notice it. The Psi-link Cable and I share is a strong golden glow in the back of my mind, unobtrusive and comforting. It's faded away to the barest thread. And now that I've noticed, it's like a dark void, almost painful. My head is pounding- there's a good possibility of a concussion as a result of hitting the wall. I force myself to stay awake as a precaution, though it *would* serve him right if I fell asleep here and never woke up again. But then I'd miss the chance to kick his ass into next week when Nate finally shows up to bust me out.

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It's later. Hours, maybe, possibly a whole day. It's hard to tell in the darkness. The door opens.

I'm surprised to see that only Ophelia stands there, peering into the darkness of the cell cautiously. "I'm supposed to take you upstairs now," she says timidly. She's probably scared senseless, given the performance I gave earlier. I climb to my feet, ignoring the pain in my head.

In comparison to the cell in the basement, the upper level of the house is opulent. Unfortunately I can't find anything that could possibly indicate the house's location as Ophelia leads me through the halls. The windows are few and bared. Ophelia shoots me a nervous glance every few seconds as if to urge me on. She stops before a door

and unlocks it with a ring of keys she takes from her pocket. She then unlocks the shackles around my wrists.

"He wants you to clean up before I take you to see him."

It's a plain looking bathroom, though quick appraisal tells me it's also escape proof. There is no inside lock, no windows. The vents are no larger than ten inches in diameter. There's a pile of clean clothes on the counter- black pants and an orchid colored button down shirt. I pause to wonder just how long he's been watching me to know me so well. I wash up and change, grateful to be rid of the sweat that still clung to my skin after the morning's run. With a damp washcloth, I gingerly wash away the dried blood on my face. There's nothing to be done about the large bruise that's formed over my right cheek and eye, giving my face twisted symmetry it normally lacks. I walk out of the bathroom, the washcloth still pressed over my eye.

"It's better not to provoke him," Ophelia says. "He won't hit you as much." She glances up at me, and then away again. "You should be proud! You're all he's talked about for months. He even moved the rest of the menagerie-"

"What does he want?" The girl seems to know the workings of this place and pumping her for a little information couldn't hurt.

"Oh, not much," she hays, misinterpreting the question. "He'll probably just want to talk to you."

"Great." The psychopath wants to talk. \*Wonderful.\* I switch tactics. "What's the menagerie?" I already have a sick feeling I know what it is, but if there's any chance I'm wrong...

"Oh, the other girls," she replies, confirming the awful suspicion. "He said he didn't want to be distracted while you were here." Her eyes gleam with a warped excitement. "He's so glad you're here."

"Yeah, I'll bet," I mutter. She leads me up to another set of doors.

"Ophelia, what took you so long?" He scowls. "Never mind. You can go now." His eyes are fixed on me as Ophelia quietly exits the room.

He waves a hand toward an empty chair. "Please, have a seat."

"I'll stand," I reply icily. I'm not about to play this game. "What do you want?"

"What makes you think I want anything more than the pleasure of your company?"

Oh, I don't know. Usually when people go to the effort of drugging and kidnapping me, they want more than idle conversation," I snap.

He grins. "My you're spiteful. Good. It'll make this more enjoyable."

I cross my arms and glare at him defiantly. "I've met a lot of twisted people in my life," I comment, "And you're working your way up to the top of the list. What's your game?"

"Game? I'm merely looking to entertain myself. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"When it involves kidnapping and battery, Yes."

He sighs impatiently, as if he's annoyed with my failure to understand his vision. "To me, people are objects. Like fine china or porcelain vases, to be collected, displayed, and enjoyed for their beauty. The world fails to see them as I do. Surly you should be grateful for someone who can appreciate you for what you are- a thing of rare and exotic beauty. I wonder if Dayspring realizes what he has."

"Feel free to ask him when he's pounding your head in. You realize they're going to be here to take me back any time now."

He shakes his head, making a slight 'tsking' noise. "Such foolish confidence. They're *\*not\** coming for you."

"The hell they're not."

He stands and walks toward me slowly. "I don't want to be insulting-"

"Too late for that."

He scowls. "Fine. They don't *\*care\** what happens to you. Your charges in X-Force, they don't need your guidance. And Dayspring has his own destiny to fulfill. They will not miss you."

"You honestly expect me to believe the words of a psychopath?"

"I expect you to believe the truth."

That's it. I'm only willing to put up with so much inane ranting, and he's reached his limit. "You're a fucking idiot if you expect me to take you at your word." That was pushing it. He grabs the front of my shirt roughly.

"It's the truth."

"Go to hell."

He pushes me roughly backwards, knocking me to the floor. I turn this to my advantage kicking his legs out from under him. No matter *\*how\** invulnerable you are, the laws of physics still apply. I get to my feet and sprint to the door, only to find it locked, the escape attempt thwarted as slams me up against the heavy wooden door, hand tightening on my throat. "That," he hisses, "Was a mistake."

He does have a weakness then. His pride. I glare at him, openly defiant despite the fact he's cutting off my air supply.

His grip slackens just as my peripheral vision begins to fade out. As I gasp in a lungful of air, he grabs my wrist in a crushing grip and unlocks the doors, throwing them open and dragging me out into the

hallway. I'm outraged at the way he manhandles me, but I'm helpless to stop him. Helpless.

And it's back to cold concrete as he flings me inside and slams the door shut. Well, I succeeded in making him angry, at any rate. I sit up and assess the new scrapes and bruises this little excursion gained me. The pain in my head has doubled, blinding in it's intensity. I give in and lean against the wall, eyes closed.

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Hours, days, weeks, perhaps. Time either flies or it crawls. It's an odd, disjointed feeling. The darkness is only broken by brief accents into the house above.

I'm walking down a familiar hallway, Ophelia leading me on. I've stopped trying to convince her to help me escape. Her answer is always the same. "It's useless."

Useless to even try. Her will isn't broken, it's been annihilated, and in her ruin, she's become dependent on him. As her empty eyes stare into my own I see what I could have become, a thousand times over, had I not been as strong a person. That only redoubles my determination that he will not break me. That I will not give him the satisfaction of seeing that space in my eyes. Conviction is one thing. The actual practice is much harder. And it's made worse still by the fact that in my sleep, I'm Tolliver's prisoner again. And when I'm awake, I'm his. It seems that there was no time between, though it's really been years. But all that seems like a faded dream. It's hard to remember sunlight when I awake in darkness and fall asleep in darkness, and the hopes of a rescue are fettered away by his constant reiteration that they will not come and do not care.

I sit across from him and say nothing. I've made every flippant, spiteful remark my mind can think of. I've worn my voice raw yelling at him. I think it amuses him.

Now I just stare as he rattles on. He has a vision, he tells me. He's moving his collection to a grander place, and eventually, he'll take me there. He pauses.

"You're thinking of Dayspring again. He's not coming. I \*told\* you that. He doesn't care." I stay silent for the first time in a long time. There's nothing \*for\* me to say. Because part of me believes him. And I realize, he's done the impossible. He's won.

To Be Continued...

End  
file.